

MEMORANDUM

September 23, 2009

TO: Planning Housing and Economic Development Committee

FROM: Marlene Michaelson, Senior Legislative Analyst *MM*
Shondell Foster, Research Associate *SF*

SUBJECT: Special Appropriation to the M-NCPPC's FY10 Operating Budget, Department of Parks, Enterprise Fund - \$150,000 for the Sligo Creek Golf Course

On September 4, 2009, the County Council received from the County Executive a special appropriation request in the amount of \$150,000 for Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) to have the Montgomery County Revenue Authority (MCRA) continue operating Sligo Creek Golf Course. Although MCRA is operating all of the MNCPPC golf courses, MCRA has exercised its right under the lease to return a course to M-NCPPC, which would result in its closure on October 1, 2009. The special appropriation would provide the funding necessary for operational costs through June 30, 2010, the end of the fiscal year.

The County Executive supports this request because he believes it is a "modest investment in an existing recreational activity" and would provide additional time to explore other options that would allow Sligo Creek Golf Course to be a self-sustaining operation. The Executive would form a task force that would explore these options. If, at the end of fiscal year 2010, more time is needed, then the Executive is willing to include additional funding in the FY11 Operating Budget. It is important to note that this supplemental appropriation does not include any support for major capital improvements or repairs and the Montgomery County Revenue Authority does not assume responsibility for any capital repairs or improvements. The Executive's request is attached at ©1-4.

Background

In October, 2006, the Council approved legislation to allow M-NCPPC and the MCRA to enter into a long term lease agreement where the MCRA would operate all of the M-NCPPC owned golf courses. This agreement was created to achieve the efficiencies associated with a single County golf system and help improve the fiscal condition of M-NCPPC's Enterprise Fund since the golf courses showed losses for 12 of the prior 13 years. These losses impacted the overall health of the Enterprise Fund, which led to General Fund subsidies to support the Enterprise Fund budget.

From the fall of 2006 through the fall of 2008, the MCRA explored options to generate additional revenues at Sligo Creek Golf Course in order to make the course self-sustaining. These options were presented to the surrounding community as well as the Planning Board. The Montgomery County Revenue Authority submitted, as part of its FY09-14 Capital Improvement Program, a project for Sligo Creek Golf Course in the amount of \$5,500,000. However, the County Executive recommended deferring this project until community concerns were resolved. The MCRA Board supported the County Executive's recommendation to defer funding for this project. The MCRA worked with a citizen advisory group, the Sligo Creek Stakeholders Advisory Group, to develop a concept plan for Sligo Creek Golf Course that would result in a self-sustaining course. No option was identified that was considered both financially viable by the Revenue Authority and acceptable by the surrounding community.

In early 2009, MCRA contracted for an independent financial analysis, which was conducted on the entire golf system to determine if any golf course was adverse to the entire golf system. The analysis concluded that Sligo Creek Golf Course was adverse to the entire golf system. (Although questions have been raised about the financial analysis, both the Planning Board and Council have reviewed it and found it to be an acceptable basis to allow MCRA to exercise the provision in the lease which allowed them to return a golf course.) Upon this finding, according to the terms of the lease agreement, MCRA returned Sligo Creek Golf Course to M-NCPPC on April 1, 2009 with an agreement that allowed for MCRA to operate the golf course through October 1, 2009. Absent any further action, on October 1, 2009, M-NCPPC will assume operation and management of the facility. Since the lease does not allow M-NCPPC to continue golf operations, the golf course would close.

Special Appropriation Request

The Council has a long standing policy of not subsidizing golf and Staff continues to support that policy¹. If the special appropriation could lead to a strategy for the long term operation that would not require a subsidy, Staff would be supportive, however Staff remains skeptical of such an outcome. The rounds of golf being played in the County and nationwide has been steadily decreasing, suggesting the inevitability of closing a course. As the popularity of different recreational activities wax and wane, the County must be prepared to increase and decrease funding accordingly. The only option on the table at this point that appears possible of achieving the goal of self-sufficiency is Councilmember Ervin's proposal to partner with Veteran's Affairs

¹ The County has provided tax-supported funding for recreational activities that serve the broader public while charging for activities that serve a more limited population (golf, indoor tennis, ice skating, boat rentals, etc.).

to provide rehabilitative golf for wounded soldiers. (see ©11-14) This option could achieve self-sufficiency if the federal government, or another entity, agreed to subsidize capital and operating expenses for the course.

In response to five Councilmembers who requested that the Planning Board and Parks Department explore short and long term options of maintaining golf at Sligo Creek Golf Course without a County subsidy, the Planning Board stated that Sligo Creek Golf Course is unlikely to be self-sustaining absent major improvements, such as those proposed by the Revenue Authority, or a continued subsidy for operations and major capital improvements. The letter is attached at ©17-19. While the conversion of the property to other uses would involve capital and operating costs that are from tax-supported revenues, the other uses being considered are park activities for which it is Council's policy to provide funding through tax-supported sources. The Planning Board reports that there is an increased demand for different outdoor park activities in the Sligo Creek Golf Course service area because the demographics of this area have significantly changed over the years. Both the Planning Board and the Parks Department have stated unequivocally that this land will not be sold to private developers and no public official at M-NCPPC or the Council has considered transfer to private developers as an option.

Staff's primary concern with this supplemental is that it is likely only to delay the decision to close a golf course while using scarce tax payer dollars that could be needed to fund higher priorities. The Executive has just identified the need to cut \$30 million from the FY10 budget and Staff is concerned that many of the proposed reductions may be a higher priority than continued operation of Sligo Creek Golf Course. Should the Council decide to fund this supplemental, Staff recommends that it make clear that it is only willing to consider options for the golf course that will lead to future self-sustainability and clearly reject the option of a permanent subsidy for golf.

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OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND 20850Isiah Leggett
County Executive

MEMORANDUM

September 3, 2009

TO: Phil Andrews, President, County Council

FROM: Isiah Leggett, County Executive 

SUBJECT: Special Appropriation #10-283 to the FY10 Operating Budget
Sligo Creek Golf Course Operations
Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission
Department of Parks, Enterprise Fund - \$150,000

RECEIVED
MONTGOMERY COUNTY
COUNCIL
2009 SEP -4 AM 10:35

I am recommending a special appropriation to the FY10 Operating Budget of the Department of Parks of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission in the total amount of \$150,000 to continue operation of the Sligo Creek Golf Course during this fiscal year. This amount reflects the amount of funds to be paid by the Department of Parks to the Montgomery County Revenue Authority for operating the golf course during FY10 including \$5,000 for any minor capital reserves that may be needed to sustain golf course operations. At my request, the Revenue Authority prepared a budget for the remainder of the fiscal year to allow for continued operation of the Sligo Creek Golf Course. The budget is attached and reflects a significant absorption of overhead expenses by the Revenue Authority through a reduced management fee of \$46,533.

While I share the Council's concerns about subsidizing golf activities, the reality is that the proposed supplemental is a modest investment in an existing recreation activity. When compared to the unavoidable costs the Department of Parks would incur this fiscal year to decommission Sligo Creek Golf Course and the investment that would be required to put this Course to a different use, I believe that this supplemental appropriation for operations will end up being a significantly smaller requirement of public funds at this time.

As I indicated in my July 29, 2009 memorandum to the Council, based on feedback I have received from you and a variety of community leaders, I believe we should again review our options before proceeding to close this golf course. I am in the process of forming a task force as described in my earlier memorandum to examine appropriate solutions to transform Sligo Golf Course into a self-sustaining operation. Barring any failure of capital improvements, this supplemental will get the golf course through FY10 while the group examines golf options for the Sligo Creek Golf Course, and if more time is needed, I am prepared to include another year of operations in my FY11 Operating Budget. It is important to note that while the Revenue Authority has proposed a budget for operating the golf course, it has clearly stated that it is not funding, nor assuming responsibility for, any capital repairs that may be required at the course.

Phil Andrews, President, County Council
September 3, 2009
Page 2

I recommend that the County Council approve this supplemental appropriation in the amount of \$150,000 and specify the source of funds as General Fund Undesignated Reserves. This supplemental will reduce County General Government Fund Reserves by \$150,000 and is consistent with the fund balance policy for tax supported reserves.

Given the anticipated closure of the golf course as of October 1, 2009, I appreciate your prompt consideration of this action.

LL:dj

Attachment: Special Appropriation #10-283

c: Keith Miller, Executive Director, Revenue Authority
Royce Hanson, Chair, Montgomery County Planning Board
Kathleen Boucher, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer
Diane Schwartz Jones, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer
Joseph F. Beach, Director, Office of Management and Budget

Resolution No: _____
Introduced: _____
Adopted: _____

COUNTY COUNCIL
FOR MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND

By: Council President at the Request of the County Executive

SUBJECT: Special Appropriation #10-283 to the FY10 Operating Budget
Sligo Creek Golf Course Operations
Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission
Department of Parks, Enterprise Fund - \$150,000

Background

1. Article 28, section 2-118(a)(6) of the Annotated Code of Maryland permits the County Council to amend the budget of the M-NCPPC by resolution on the Council's initiative, or at the request of the Commission, after receipt of a recommendation from the County Executive, and after public hearing upon reasonable notice to the public.
2. Section 308 of the Montgomery County Charter provides that a special appropriation: (a) may be made at any time after public notice by news release; (b) must state that the special appropriation is necessary to meet an unforeseen disaster or other emergency or to act without delay in the public interest; (c) must specify the revenues necessary to finance it; and (d) must be approved by no fewer than six members of the Council.
3. The County Executive has requested the following FY10 Operating Budget appropriation increases for the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission – Department of Parks, Enterprise Fund:

<u>Personnel Services</u>	<u>Operating Expenses</u>	<u>Capital Outlay</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Source of Funds</u>
\$0	\$150,000	\$0	\$150,000	General Fund Undesignated Reserves

This increase is needed in order to ensure M-NCPPC has sufficient resources to continue operations of the Sligo Creek Golf Course.

4. The County Executive has requested a special appropriation to the FY10 Operating Budget in the amount of \$150,000 for the operation of the Sligo Golf Course including \$5,000 for any minor capital reserves that may be needed to sustain golf course operations and specifies that the source of funds will be General Fund Undesignated Reserves.
5. The public was notified by a news release.

Action

The County Council for Montgomery County, Maryland, approves the following actions:

1. A special appropriation to the FY10 Operating Budget of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission – Department of Parks, Enterprise Fund is approved as follows:

<u>Personnel Services</u>	<u>Operating Expenses</u>	<u>Capital Outlay</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Source of Funds</u>
\$0	\$150,000	\$0	\$150,000	General Funds Undesignated Reserves

2. The County Council declares that this action is necessary to act without delay in the public interest.

This is a correct copy of Council action.

Linda M. Lauer, Clerk of the Council



July 29, 2009

Valerie Ervin, County Council, District 5
Marc Elrich, County Council, At-Large
Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear Councilmembers Ervin and Elrich:

Thank you for your inquiries and discussion regarding possible solutions for the Sligo Creek Golf Course. As you are well aware, the Sligo Creek Golf Course is scheduled to close on October 1st of this year unless action is taken to preserve this facility for use by the local community and all County residents. In previous discussions with the County Council, the Revenue Authority has indicated that, without substantial capital investments, they do not believe this golf course has the potential for ever becoming self sufficient. For this reason, the Revenue Authority has requested and the Council has approved a change to the lease agreement with the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) to return responsibility for this golf course back to M-NCPPC.

After careful consideration on this matter and feedback I have received from you and a variety of community leaders, I believe we should again review our options before proceeding to close this golf course. Specifically, I will request that the County Council provide a supplemental appropriation to fund continued operations of the facility for no more than the next 24 months while we review other options to make this facility self-supporting for the long term. While this approach will continue temporarily the operation of the golf course, we need to avoid imposing these costs on the Revenue Authority or M-NCPPC for the continued operation of a facility with conditions that prevent it from becoming profitable.

I will shortly form a task force with representatives of the local community, Revenue Authority, M-NCPPC, and County Government who will identify and develop options for the continued, self-sustaining operation of the Sligo Creek Golf Course. I would welcome the Council's participation in this Task Force as well. I believe by collaboratively working together we can identify the appropriate solutions for maintaining this golf course in a self sustaining manner into the future.

Sincerely,



Isiah Leggett
County Executive

IL:df

cc: Phil Andrews, President, County Council
Roger Berliner, County Council
Nancy Floreen, County Council
Mike Knapp, County Council
George Leventhal, County Council
Nancy Navarro, County Council
Duchy Trachtenberg, County Council
Kathleen Boucher, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer
Keith Miller, Executive Director, Revenue Authority
Royce Hanson, Chair, Montgomery County Planning Board



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

VALERIE ERVIN
COUNCILMEMBER
DISTRICT 5

July 27, 2009

To: Royce Hanson, Chair, Montgomery County Planning Board

From: Valerie Ervin

Subject: Request that the Planning Board continue to investigate preserving golf at the Sligo Creek Golf Course

It has been brought to my attention that during the July 16th Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission Planning Board meeting, the Board unanimously decided to remove the option of maintaining Sligo Creek Golf Course as a golf course from the re-use study being conducted by the Department of Parks. I understand that the Board is legally bound by the lease agreement between the Montgomery County Revenue Authority and M-NCPPC, and thus chose only to evaluate the nature preserve and the "fun for all" recreational park options. However, if directed by the Council, the Board would include the option of maintaining Sligo Creek Golf Course as a golf course in the re-use study.

While I applaud the Board's efforts to fulfill its objectives of satisfying recreation needs while maintaining open green space, as the Councilmember for this district, I believe it is critical that the Board include the option for golf, and I am requesting that golf be placed back on the list of options to be further explored and considered by the Parks Department.

Since Sligo Creek Golf Course is the only public golf course inside the beltway, and has been a part of the down-county community for decades, the impending closure of this course has ignited a flood of community concerns about the need to keep Sligo Creek Golf Course as a golf course. In order for the Council to take the appropriate action for this facility, we must fully appreciate the fiscal impacts of maintaining this facility as a golf course versus using this public land in another capacity. To do this we must fully understand the cost of needed capital improvements and what level of operating budget subsidy would allow the course to become self-sustaining.

Lastly, while there has been no mention by the Planning Board or any public official of the potential to sell the golf course land for private use (such as housing), a rumor of this possibility continues to circulate. I believe it is critical for the Planning Board to explicitly state that there is no intention of selling this land and that any option you



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

VALERIE ERVIN
COUNCILMEMBER
DISTRICT 5

consider will retain it as parkland. In considering re-use options for the site, I believe it is vital that we maintain it as open green space for community use and that we minimally impact the surrounding communities.

I look forward to your response and to continuing to work with you and your staff on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Valerie Ervin".

Valerie Ervin

cc: Phil Andrews, County Council President
Roger Berliner, Councilmember—District 1
Marc Elrich, Councilmember At Large
Nancy Floreen, Councilmember At Large
Mike Knapp, Councilmember—District 2
George Leventhal, Councilmember At large
Nancy Navarro, Councilmember—District 4
Duchy Trachtenberg, Councilmember At Large
Ike Leggett, County Executive
Keith Miller, Executive Director of the Montgomery County Revenue Authority
Mary Bradford, Director of Parks
Rachel Newhouse, Department of Parks Planner Coordinator
Shondell Foster, County Council Research Associate
Marlene Michaelson, County Council Senior Legislative Analyst
Mike Welsh, President of North Hills Civic Association
Heather Phipps, Vice President of Neighbors of Northwest Branch
Karen Howland, Woodside Forrest Civic Association
Woody Brosnan, North Woodside Civic Association
Jim Picrobon, Sligo Branview Civic Association
Mark Suffanti, SaveSligoGolf.com
Lillian Louise Hall



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

VALERIE ERVIN
COUNCILMEMBER
DISTRICT 5

July 30, 2009

The Honorable Delegate Alfred Carr, Jr.
House Office Building, Room 222
6 Biaden St., Annapolis, MD 21401

To the Honorable Delegate Alfred Carr, Jr.,

Thank you for expressing your strong support for maintaining the Sligo Creek Golf Course as a golf course. This is an issue of great importance to Montgomery County residents, especially golfers and down-county residents, as it is the only public golf course inside the beltway. I am writing to you today to request your help in keeping this unique community treasure in operation.

As you know, the prior County Council approved a lease agreement between the Montgomery County Revenue Authority and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission after it was shown that public golf courses, while under M-NCPPC's management, experienced increased financial losses for 12 of the 13 years studied, lacked the revenue to make necessary capital improvements, and showed the continued decline of infrastructure.

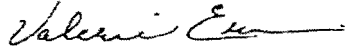
In my opinion, this course serves an important community need and its closure would be detrimental to the area. Re-establishing another golf course inside the beltway would be a nearly impossible and extremely expensive task. Despite our dire budget constraints this year, I believe that we cannot be short-sighted about preserving this important community resource.

To preserve this golf course, the Council will have to amend the lease and negotiate with the Revenue Authority to continue course operations. This means the county will have to subsidize operating and capital expenses.

The county will need your help to secure funding for one-time capital improvements at the course. These improvements will be necessary for the long-term viability of course operations. I have asked Park and Planning to prepare a cost estimate for necessary improvements, and I will forward that information as soon as it becomes available.

In the meantime, if you need additional information, please contact me. Thank you so much for your dedicated service. I look forward to working with you on this important issue.

Sincerely,



Valerie Ervin

Montgomery County Councilmember, District 5

cc:

Phil Andrews, County Council President
Roger Berliner, Councilmember—District 1
Marc Elrich, Councilmember At Large
Nancy Floreen, Councilmember At Large
Mike Knapp, Councilmember—District 2
George Leventhal, Councilmember At large
Nancy Navarro, Councilmember—District 4
Duchy Trachtenberg, Councilmember At Large
Ike Leggett, County Executive
Keith Miller, Executive Director of the Montgomery County Revenue Authority
Mary Bradford, Director of Parks
Rachel Newhouse, Department of Parks Planner Coordinator
Shondell Foster, County Council Research Associate
Marlene Michaelson, County Council Senior Legislative Analyst
Mike Welsh, President of North Hills Civic Association
Heather Phipps, Vice President of Neighbors of Northwest Branch
Karen Howland, Woodside Forrest Civic Association
Woody Brosnan, North Woodside Civic Association
Jim Pierobon, Sligo Branview Civic Association
Mark Suffanti, SaveSligoGolf.com
Lillian Louise Hall



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

VALERIE ERVIN
COUNCILMEMBER
DISTRICT 5

August 4, 2009

The Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs
Mr. James A. Adkins, Secretary
Mr. Wilbert Forbes, Deputy Secretary
The Jeffrey Building, 4th Floor
16 Francis Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Secretary Adkins and Deputy Secretary Forbes:

I am writing to propose an innovative partnership between Montgomery County and the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs focused on therapeutic golf for veterans at Sligo Creek Golf Course in Silver Spring, Maryland. This publicly owned, nine-hole golf course faces an uncertain future because of the fiscal constraints confronting Montgomery County. One option being considered by some county lawmakers would close the Sligo Creek Golf Course on October 1, 2009. Instead of losing this valuable community asset, I propose that the course begin to serve veterans, especially those who are returning home from Afghanistan and Iraq with injuries that can be ameliorated by golf.

As you may know, a similar model can be found in Washington at the American Lake Veterans Golf Course (www.alvetsgolfcourse.com), which is dedicated to providing, teaching and promoting the benefits of golf to veterans including those who are receiving medical care and outpatient veterans who have disabilities. The goal of creating a similar partnership in Montgomery County would be to provide a therapeutic environment where all golfers can enjoy the benefits of golf, such as exercise and relaxation, in a positive and accepting social environment.

At the American Lake Veterans Golf Course, hospital in-patients and their guests have first priority on the course. Persons in possession of a Veterans Universal Access

Identification Card and their guests may also use the course. In addition, active duty and retired military with military identification cards and their guests may play on the course. Military hospital in-patients play at no cost, and golf clubs, balls, tees and carts are also provided free of charge. Authorized military personnel are required to pay green and cart fees. The course is open seven days a week, except during the holiday season. Tee times are not required and golfers play on a first-come, first-served basis.

It is my understanding that the American Lake Golf Course is operated and maintained by an all volunteer force consisting of grounds crews, maintenance personnel, operating staff and management personnel. This course is not supported by government funds and operating and capital costs are paid for with annual pass and daily green fee revenues. Friends of American Lake Veterans Golf Course, a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization, also raises funds to support the course. For example, they are currently raising \$5.5 million for a new rehabilitation center.

Sligo Creek Golf Course is the only publicly owned, nine-hole golf course inside the beltway, and it is located only five miles from the National Naval Medical Center and three miles from Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Also, many military families live in the Washington Metropolitan Area and could conveniently take advantage of this resource.

There is strong support for maintaining the Sligo Creek Golf Course in the neighboring community and among golfers throughout Montgomery County. Many residents have banded together to form a non-profit organization to help save the course, and more information can be found at www.savesligogolf.com.

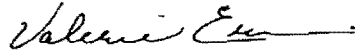
Sligo Creek Golf Course serves an important community need and its closure would be detrimental to Montgomery County. Re-establishing another golf course inside the beltway would be nearly impossible and an extremely expensive task. Despite Montgomery County's dire budget constraints this year, I believe that we cannot be short-sighted about preserving this important community resource over the long-term.

These trying economic times call on all of us to think creatively. When I saw the information about the American Lake View Golf Course, I knew this model is something I wanted to explore for Sligo Creek Golf Course. While public use and golf course access must be maintained, I know that by working together we can come up with a plan to make the course an even greater community resource.

On a personal note, I grew up in a military family. I know what soldiers and their families go through each and every day to serve our country. I think this proposed partnership is a small way that I can help to give something back to those who have given so much.

I would love the opportunity to take you and appropriate staff members on a tour of Sligo Creek Golf Course and to talk more about potential partnership opportunities. Please contact me at your earliest convenience so that we can begin discussing what is possible for our soldiers and Montgomery County residents at the Sligo Creek Golf Course.

Sincerely,



Valerie Ervin

Montgomery County Councilmember, District 5

cc: Anthony Brown, Lt. Governor
Isiah Leggett, County Executive
Phil Andrews, County Council President
Roger Berliner, Councilmember—District 1
Marc Elrich, Councilmember
Nancy Floreen, Councilmember
Mike Knapp, Councilmember—District 2
George Leventhal, Councilmember
Nancy Navarro, Councilmember—District 4
Duchy Trachtenberg, Councilmember
Royce Hanson, Chair, Montgomery County Planning Board
Keith Miller, Executive Director, Montgomery County Revenue Authority
Mary Bradford, Director of Parks, M-NCPPC
Rachel Newhouse, Department of Parks Planner Coordinator, M-NCPPC
Ronald Kauffman, Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Jonathan Walker, Sr., County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Norman Locksley, County Commission on Veterans Affairs
William Gray, County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Elizabeth Jane McCarthy, County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Peter Esker, County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Lorrie Knight-Major, County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Mier Wolf, County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Henry Richard Fales, County Commission on Veterans Affairs
J. Mauri Hamilton, County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Susan Kirk, County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Jacqueline Hunt Ogg, County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Michael L. Subin, County Executive Designee, County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Jerry Godwin, Dept. of Economic Development Designee, County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Richard M. Schiffauer, Dept. of Health and Human Services Designee, County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Shondell Foster, Research Associate, County Council
Marlene Michaelson, Senior Legislative Analyst, County Council
Mike Welsh, President, North Hills Civic Association
Heather Phipps, Vice President, Neighbors of Northwest Branch
Karen Howland, Woodside Forrest Civic Association
Woody Brosnan, North Woodside Civic Association

Jim Pierobon, Sligo Branview Civic Association
Mark Suffanti, SaveSligoGolf.com
Lillian Louise Hall



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

VALERIE ERVIN
COUNCILMEMBER
DISTRICT 5

To: Royce Hanson, Chair, Montgomery County Planning Board
Mary Bradford, Director, M-NCPPC, Department of Parks

From: Valerie Ervin, ^{VE}Nancy Floreen, ^{NF}George Leventhal, ^{GL}Marc Elrich, ^{ME}and Nancy ^{NV}Navarro

Date: August 25, 2009

Subject: Request that the Planning Board and Parks Staff Evaluate Short- and Long-Term Options to Preserve Golf at Sligo Creek Golf Course

We are writing to request that you engage in discussions with the Revenue Authority to extend the lease at Sligo Creek Golf Course for 12 months and to work on long-term options for preserving golf at Sligo Creek Golf Course.

Various alternatives have been proposed for the use of the property. At this juncture, it does not seem to us that any alternative is preferable, nor more cost-effective, than the continued availability of golf. We request that Park and Planning staff evaluate - as one possible option for use of the property - how we can maintain golf at Sligo Creek over the short- and long-term without a taxpayer subsidy. If Park and Planning does not evaluate this option among others, there is a chance that the Council will adopt an option that has not had the benefit of Park and Planning's review.

As you know, the County Executive is planning to submit a supplemental appropriation to the Council in September that requires current revenue to maintain golf course operations at Sligo Creek Golf Course. We have concerns about spending taxpayer dollars to subsidize golf; however, possible alternative uses of the site will also require taxpayer dollars. For example, if golf operations do not continue, the Council will be expected to provide a \$56,000 supplemental for short-term interim care of the Sligo Creek Golf Course property. A strong case can be made that this money would be better spent towards keeping the Sligo Creek Golf Course operational.

One long-term solution proposed by Councilmember Ervin is the feasibility of a partnership between the Parks Department and the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs focused on therapeutic golf for veterans at Sligo Creek Golf Course. Councilmember Ervin has discussed this proposal with Deputy Secretary Wilbert Forbes.

He expressed support for this idea and is willing to work with us to find a solution that could benefit the public and veterans.

Another long-term solution could include an evaluation of how the three funding streams (the Revenue Authority golf income, the Park & Planning enterprise fund, and the Recreation Department Agency Fund) can be restructured to keep Sligo Creek Golf Course open with a cross-subsidy from other recreational activities.

As you know, these are not the only options. Since Councilmembers have no expertise in managing golf courses, we encourage you to think creatively on how we can preserve golf at Sligo Creek while minimizing the burden on taxpayers.

Sligo Creek Golf Course serves an important community need and its closure would be detrimental to the County. Despite the County's dire budget constraints, we believe that we cannot be short-sighted about preserving this important resource. We hope that by working together we can come up with options to save the Sligo Creek Golf Course.

cc: Ike Leggett, County Executive
Keith Miller, Executive Director, Montgomery County Revenue Authority
Rachel Newhouse, Department of Parks Planner Coordinator
Shondell Foster, County Council Research Associate
Marlene Michaelson, County Council Senior Legislative Analyst
Mike Welsh, President of North Hills Civic Association
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Jim Pierobon, Sligo Branview Civic Association
Mark Suffanti, SaveSligoGolf.com
Lillian Louise Hall



MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING BOARD
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN

MEMORANDUM

August 31, 2009

To: Council Members Ervin, Leventhal, Navarro, Floreen, and Elrich

From: 
Royce Hanson, Chair, MCPB

Subject: Sligo Golf Course

We have participated in discussions with the Montgomery County Revenue Authority (MCRA) and the Executive Branch concerning the County Executive's proposal to continue operation of the Sligo Golf Course (Sligo) for two years while further study is conducted of ways to sustain the course without a subsidy.

In your memo of August 25, 2009, you asked that our staff evaluate how the Commission can maintain golf at Sligo without a taxpayer subsidy. The Revenue Authority as operator of the county's 9 public golf courses is best positioned to undertake that task and has spent considerable time evaluating such options.

We gently remind you that the Council strongly encouraged the transfer of golf management to MCRA because our Enterprise Division was not operating the courses, including management of its debt service, without a subsidy. (It has been strong Council policy that all enterprise programs, including their debt service for capital improvements, be self sufficient. In fact, general fund support for these facilities has been reduced each year by the Council with Executive support.) As a condition of accepting the four Commission-owned golf courses into its portfolio, MCRA insisted on a lease provision that permitted it to return a course to the Commission if its continued operation adversely affected the financial condition of the entire golf system. A course returned to the management of the Commission may not, under the lease, be operated as a golf course, as it would compete with the rest of the public system and continue to affect adversely the MCRA's ability to operate a financially self sufficient golf system. The Council approved this lease.

MCRA examined alternatives that could allow Sligo to operate without a cross-subsidy from its other operations. Following its assumption of management of the system, MCRA undertook a months-long process of working with the Sligo community to seek agreement on improvements to the course that would make it financially self-sufficient. Agreement could not be reached on

a plan that was satisfactory to neighboring communities, or one that our board could endorse, because of its adverse impacts on nearby homes.

MCRA determined that it could not justify the capital investments necessary to sustain the course without more revenue-generating facilities. Early this year, MCRA advised the Commission that, based on an independent study by the National Golf Foundation of the entire system's finances, including each individual course, it would invoke the "return/no competition" clause of the lease and return Sligo to the Commission on April 1, 2009. We negotiated an agreement that the MCRA would delay the return until October 1, 2009, the end of the peak golfing season. The Council was informed of the situation and approved it.

The Parks Department began a process of community outreach and engaged in preliminary consideration of various options for short and long-term future uses for Sligo as a park once it was extracted from the golf system and returned to the Commission. The Parks Department made clear at each of these meetings that it could not operate the facility as a golf course unless the lease was amended to permit that to occur. And even in that event, an operating subsidy would be necessary, requiring an appropriation from the County Council.

At the Planning Board's hearing and work session on July 16th on alternative futures for Sligo, most of the testimony favored continuing operations as a golf course. The Board explained the situation, noting that *absent (a) Council action that would underwrite its continued operation as a golf course after October 1, and (b) an agreement with MCRA, we could not operate it as such.* Accordingly, we directed the staff to prepare interim and long term plans for the park that excluded golf operations.

Following that meeting the County Executive indicated that notwithstanding the current fiscal condition of the county, he would ask the Council to provide an operating subsidy to keep the course in operation while further efforts are undertaken to make it self-sustaining. I understand that he has now asked the Council for a special appropriation of \$150,000 to subsidize golf operations at Sligo for the remainder of this fiscal year, and indicated a willingness to extend the subsidy for another year if agreement has not been reached on a means of making the course self-sustaining. No provision has been made for any capital repairs or replacements that may become necessary during this period.

We do not think it is possible to sustain golf at Sligo without either the kind of major improvements proposed by the MCRA or a continuing subsidy for operations and major capital improvements. Having the course improved so that it can serve disabled veterans is an attractive idea, but that is also likely to require both capital and operating subsidies. Only the Council can make a policy decision that taxpayers should subsidize golf. Absent that commitment it is not helpful to hold out hope to those that wish golf to remain at Sligo.

You are correct that conversion to other uses, including nature-centered and active recreation facilities, will involve both capital and operating costs. These uses, however, are traditional public park activities that are supported primarily by tax revenues, with some supplemental

support from permit and user fees, in contrast with park enterprise facilities and Revenue Authority facilities, which have historically been expected to cover all operating and capital costs from user fees.

We should expect that interim uses will continue for five or more years before the property undergoes any major alteration for another purpose. The \$56,000 for 9 months that we reported during recent discussions was based on mothballing this valuable piece of real estate, which I do not believe is what we will actually do for the next 5 years. We will surely be asked to allow other uses that involve costs, and at a minimum we will have to police the property extensively, and maintain it for public use, whatever that is. It would, of course, be desirable to convert the property to its new park uses as soon as it is fiscally prudent to do so.

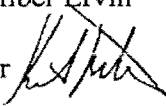
The Planning Board shares the dismay at closing the Sligo golf course. It has been an important asset of the park system for many years. Its use, however, has declined once again after a brief spike in usage. It remains underused and its infrastructure is well past its normal life and in need of major renovation and replacement. The Revenue Authority, which has been an effective and economical operator of the Commission's golf courses since assuming responsibility for them, found that Sligo's continuation, without major improvements that have been unacceptable to the neighboring community, was adverse to the financial viability of the overall public golf system. Golf courses across the country are closing due to rising costs and declining demand. The demographics of the service area for Sligo have changed substantially over the years, generating demand for more and different outdoor park activities. It may be time reluctantly to conclude that there can be a different and better future for this strategically located park.

Cc: Ike Leggett, County Executive
Keith Miller, Executive Director, MCRA
Shondell Foster, County Council Research Associate
Marlene Michaelson, County Council Senior Legislative Analyst
Mary Bradford, Director, Department of Parks



MONTGOMERY COUNTY REVENUE AUTHORITY

MEMORANDUM

TO: Councilmember Ervin
FROM: Keith Miller 
DATE: July 22, 2009
RE: Sligo Creek Golf Course Demographic Information

As per the request of your staff, we are providing information regarding the patrons at Sligo Creek Golf Course. Please note this information was collected as part of previous customer service surveys and not a specific demographic study. However, the National Golf Foundation (NGF) has stated that they believe the demographics do represent the average Sligo customer.

The attached information is the percentage of customers that responded to each item. We have provided data for all of the golf courses as a means of comparison. The NGF also stated, "If you look at the total percentages of Sligo customer's demographics they do run average with the rest of your properties. This does show congruency and validity in the percentages even with the lower response rate". After reviewing the percentages of female and senior golfers and the income percentages we agree with NGF's assessment.

We have heard many of the accusations that the Sligo Creek Golf Course is a unique golf course that serves a more diverse patron then the other MCRA facilities. Although we do not conduct specific demographic studies of our patrons, we believe the above information confirms our outreach at all of the facilities.

The MCRA has worked extensively to grow the game of golf and it was not our intention to close Sligo Creek Golf Course. As you are aware, we originally presented a plan that would have renovated the facility and provided a state of the art learning center while still providing 9-holes of golf. One of our goals is to provide a sustainable golf course system without taxpayer subsidy. We can only accomplish this if we grow the game, which has been a main focus of the MCRA for many years. Some of our recent initiatives are:

Supply and Demand Pricing – In 2006, we introduced supply and demand pricing which has greatly increased accessibility to our golf courses. For example, prior to 2006 a golf course would have a posted price of \$50 from 6AM to 6PM. We now analyze data

which, based on demand, allows us to offer multiple rates throughout the day. So now the same golf course may charge: \$55 from 6 – 10AM, \$50 from 10 – 12, \$40 from 12 – 2, \$29 from 2 – 4PM, and \$19 after 4PM.

Junior Golf – We are a strong supporter of junior golf through the programming we offer directly and through our partnerships with the First Tee of Montgomery County and the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). Laytonsville, Needwood, and Sligo Creek are homes of the First Tee program with Laytonsville offering the largest program. In the fall, we will offer The First Tee Program at Northwest. We have continued to grow our relationship with MCPS by now offering a Middle School Program and based on a partnership between Laytonsville Golf Course and Goshen Elementary School, golf is part of the 5th grade physical education curriculum at all MCPS elementary schools.

Family Golf – In 2009 we introduced family golf to our system. This program offers a course within a course for juniors. Tee markers have been set up at all of our facilities that allow juniors to play from short yardages while the adults in the group can still play from their full distance. Special scorecards are provided for family golf participants making it a fun experience for the whole group. The program is available anytime and we offer a special rate of \$10 per person beginning 5PM at all of the golf courses. Additionally, we have offered FREE 1 hour golf lessons on the 1st Saturday of each month from May through August to families at all of the golf courses.

Get Golf Ready – This is a national program designed to introduce golf to adults. The program is 5 one hour lessons for a cost of \$95.00.

Summer Camps Program – In 2008, we partnered with the Recreation Department and introduced golf to over 1000 kids through their summer camps program. Unfortunately, due to staffing challenges we were not able to continue this program in 2009 but we are optimistic we will do this again in the future.

We are currently working on other initiatives to grow the game in Montgomery County such as a new ladies program.

In closing, the decision to return Sligo Creek was very difficult for the MCRA and we understand the communities concerns. Sligo Creek Golf Course has provided a lot of great memories and experiences for many people. However, Sligo Creek is not unique to the golf system and does not provide golf to a distinctive group.

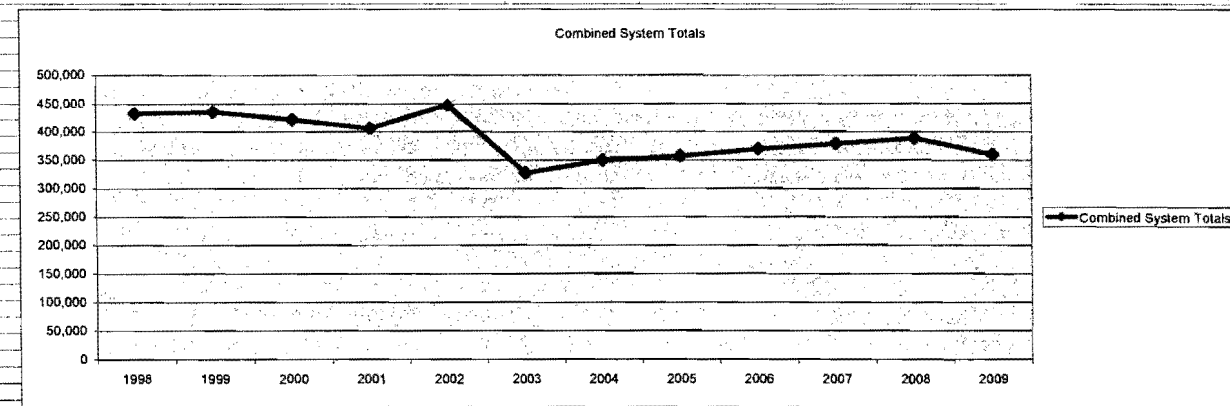
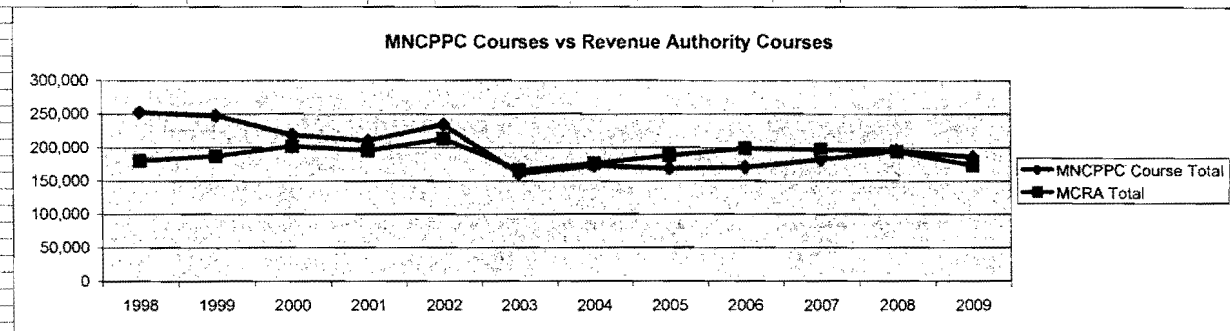
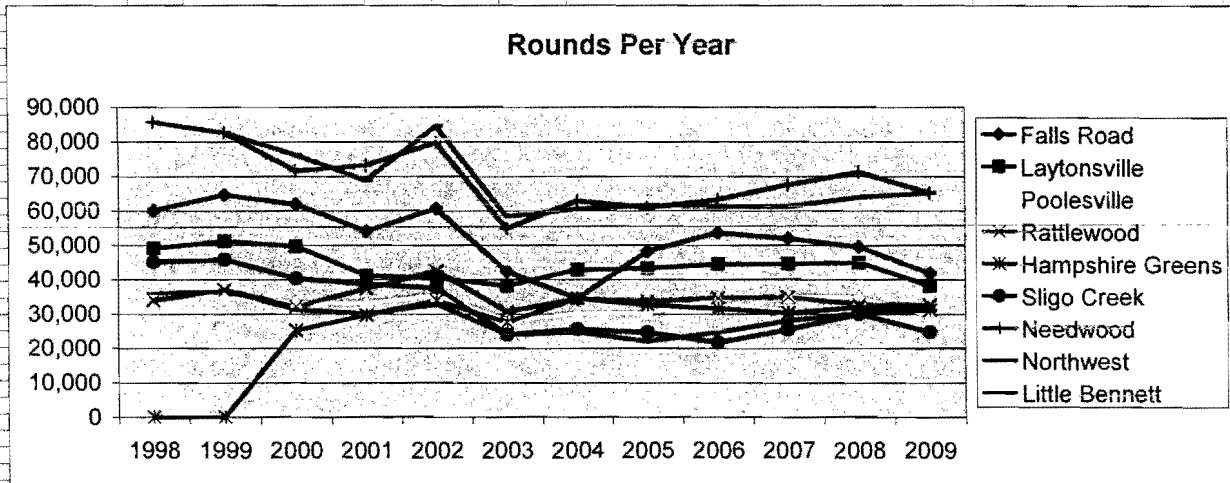
	Falls Road		Hampshire Greens		Laytonsville		Little Bennett		Needwood		Northwest		Poolsville		Rattlewood		Silgo Creek	
	2007	2008	2007	2008	2007	2008	2007	2008	2007	2008	2007	2008	2007	2008	2007	2008	2007	2008
Average Rounds	7.24	6.81	6.58	5.652	9.69	7.477	6.5	5.763	9.91	8.61	10.3	8.37	9.26	7.14	6.7	7.91	11.3	11.19
Gender																		
Male	86%	90%	93%	92%	90%	91%	92%	92%	89%	88%	91%	92%	91%	92%	93%	92%	82%	90%
Female	14%	10%	7%	8%	10%	9%	8%	8%	11%	12%	9%	8%	9%	8%	7%	8%	18%	10%
Age																		
Under 30	10%	8%	8%	7%	9%	9%	7%	8%	8%	9%	9%	6%	5%	7%	6%	5%	9%	13%
30-49	43%	38%	46%	40%	34%	33%	50%	46%	37%	33%	41%	39%	46%	36%	39%	32%	40%	30%
50 +	47%	55%	45%	54%	57%	58%	42%	47%	55%	58%	50%	55%	49%	57%	55%	63%	50%	57%
Income																		
Under \$25,000	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	2%	1%
\$25,000 - \$49,999	3%	4%	3%	4%	4%	5%	4%	4%	5%	5%	4%	5%	4%	2%	5%	6%	6%	6%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	7%	7%	11%	12%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	9%	10%	11%	9%	8%	10%	12%	11%	11%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	14%	13%	16%	16%	16%	16%	16%	16%	16%	15%	15%	19%	15%	17%	18%	16%	17%	13%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	22%	27%	28%	28%	26%	24%	26%	25%	22%	24%	25%	23%	27%	25%	26%	25%	24%	16%
\$150,000 - \$199,999	17%	14%	15%	12%	13%	14%	16%	14%	13%	13%	14%	14%	16%	16%	13%	12%	14%	15%
\$200,000 - \$249,999	6%	6%	7%	6%	7%	5%	7%	6%	7%	5%	5%	6%	5%	6%	5%	3%	5%	3%
\$250,000 or above	11%	8%	6%	6%	5%	5%	6%	7%	5%	7%	5%	6%	7%	6%	3%	5%	6%	3%
Prefer not to answer	18%	21%	14%	16%	18%	20%	16%	18%	21%	21%	19%	17%	18%	20%	19%	21%	16%	32%
Customer Segments																		
Resident - County	67%	74%	60%	71%	76%	78%	59%	66%	77%	76%	68%	72%	71%	75%	52%	56%	69%	74%
Non Resident - County	21%	17%	28%	17%	16%	13%	30%	20%	16%	16%	24%	18%	18%	16%	35%	23%	20%	14%
League player	2%	2%	5%	1%	4%	3%	1%	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%	4%	1%	3%	12%	1%	4%
Corporate Outing Player	1%	0%	1%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	4%	0%	0%	1%
Member of an area club	3%	2%	0%	6%	0%	3%	4%	6%	2%	4%	2%	3%	3%	2%	0%	4%	3%	4%
Other	6%	4%	5%	4%	2%	3%	5%	5%	2%	3%	5%	5%	3%	5%	5%	6%	8%	4%

22

Total Rounds of Golf for All MCRA and M-NCPPC Courses

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Total	Yearly Average
Falls Road	60,106	64,603	61,878	54,156	60,613	42,314	34,516	48,241	53,663	52,022	49,559	41,909	623,580	51,955
Laytonsville	49,161	51,118	49,659	41,139	40,545	38,060	42,789	43,331	44,509	44,675	44,959	38,230	528,175	44,016
Poolesville	37,073	34,708	33,298	33,192	35,449	28,060	30,159	30,248	34,347	35,159	34,739	29,589	396,021	33,002
Rattlewood	34,002	37,011	32,170	37,313	42,585	30,864	34,505	33,734	34,672	35,023	32,934	32,627	417,240	34,770
Hampshire Greens	0	0	25,212	29,702	33,948	27,526	34,439	32,642	31,815	30,311	32,048	31,156	308,599	30,860
Sligo Creek	45,100	45,900	40,320	38,700	37,520	24,010	25,542	24,683	21,822	25,591	29,906	24,868	383,962	31,997
Needwood	85,690	82,620	71,680	73,100	79,730	54,880	62,871	60,904	63,191	67,581	71,238	65,240	838,725	69,894
Northwest	85,690	82,620	76,160	68,800	84,420	58,310	60,589	61,516	61,248	61,255	63,988	65,175	829,751	69,146
Little Bennett	36,080	36,720	31,360	30,100	32,830	24,010	24,744	22,039	24,753	28,086	30,328	31,067	352,117	29,343
MNCPPC Course Total	252,560	247,860	219,520	210,700	234,500	161,210	173,726	169,142	171,014	182,513	195,460	186,350		
MCRA Total	180,342	187,440	202,217	195,502	213,140	166,624	176,408	188,196	198,806	197,190	194,239	173,511		
System Total	432,902	435,300	421,737	406,202	447,640	327,834	350,134	357,338	369,820	379,703	389,699	359,861		

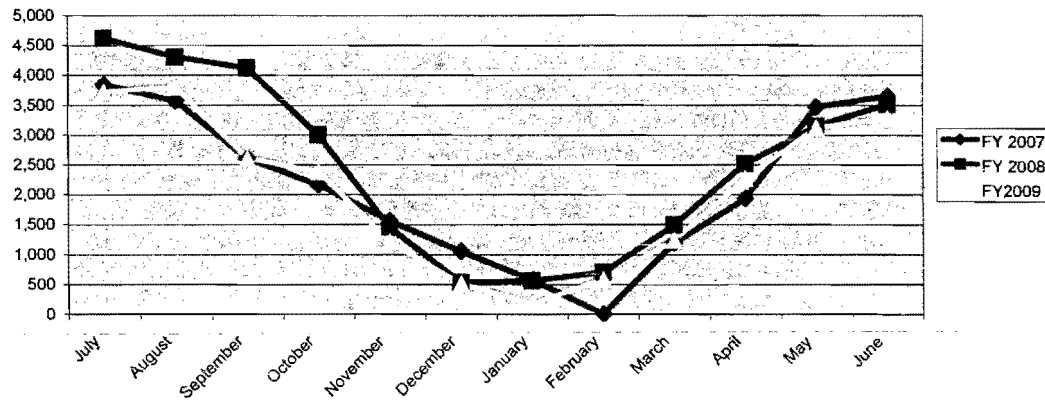
Yearly Average
394,991



Rounds of Golf Played at Sligo Creek Golf Course

	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June	Total
FY 2007	3,842	3,567	2,601	2,155	1,561	1,049	575	0	1,191	1,934	3,466	3,650	25591
FY 2008	4,617	4,300	4,117	2,994	1,447	524	558	699	1,486	2,513	3,138	3,513	29906
FY2009	3,724	3,795	2,600	2,377	1,213	509	176	583	1,236	2,263	3,115	3,277	24868

Sligo Creek Rounds FY 2007-2009



Sligo Creek Rounds FY 2007-2009

